THE Truth About CHRISTMAS

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The Truth About Christmas

The traditions surrounding Christmas stir warm feelings in the hearts of many—young and old alike—all over the Earth. Families come together. Children await the morning they will receive their presents. Loved ones give gifts, gather for Christmas dinners and recall previous Christmases spent together. There is no other time quite like it.

However, this most popular holiday in the world is facing something of a battle these days. This time that is supposed to represent joy, peace and family harmony is the source of increasing controversy.

On one side, the Christmas season has come to be associated with some very *un*merry things. The tradition of gift-giving has been transformed into a spree of materialism. Businesses see an opportunity to fill their stores and boost their profits, and consumers scramble to take advantage of bargains and deals. The sport of Christmas shopping that began for years on the Friday after Thanksgiving is now intruding on that holiday—and becoming increasingly manic. Scenes of mobbing, frenzied shoppers fighting over discounted merchandise have become commonplace.

The focus on consumerism creates other problems, such as families going into debt or failing to pay their bills in order to fund these spending sprees. Depression—which is often related to financial problems—and even suicide tend to increase during this season. On top of that, secularists are clamoring for an end to public religious displays.

On the other side of this controversy are the apparently dwindling number of people who are trying to preserve what they consider to be the sacredness of Christmas. The diminishing role of the religious figure after whom this holiday is named causes no small amount of consternation. Every year it seems, amid the noise of commercialism, materialism and excess, some few endeavor to remind everyone that this holiday is actually supposed to be about the Son of God. He is, they say, “the reason for the

season."

Where do you stand on Christmas?

The truth of the matter is that *both sides* are taking some important truths for granted, and making some big assumptions.

Do you know the TRUTH about Christmas? Perhaps you are like many others who have come to recognize many of the problems associated with this season. Maybe you choose to brush those concerns aside to keep this tradition, without thinking much more about it. Or maybe you are one of those who are becoming increasingly disenchanted each Christmas.

This subject is more important than you have probably considered.

Have you ever wondered, *What does God think about Christmas?* He is very interested in this holiday.

A Christian Holiday?

Christmas means "mass of Christ," which came to be shortened to "Christ-mass." Nearly every person who claims to be Christian—whether Catholics, Protestant or otherwise—and even many non-Christians keep this annual holiday. But where did they get this custom? It's not in the New Testament. We find no record of the original apostles celebrating this day. It is nowhere recorded in the Bible. In fact, it wasn't until *long after Christ and the apostles died* that this holiday became an accepted Christian celebration.

That's not to say this holiday started at that time. Actually, this celebration, and most of its traditions—supposedly meant to recognize the birth of Jesus Christ—began *long before Jesus was born!*

The origins of Christmas lie in ancient PAGAN practices. Not until the fourth century A.D.—*300 years after* Jesus Christ lived and died—did the Roman Catholic Church give this long-standing pagan custom its Christian-sounding name.

In his booklet *The Plain Truth About Christmas,* Herbert W. Armstrong explained how the Catholic Church came to adopt this custom: "Remember, the Roman world had been pagan. Prior to the fourth century, Christians were few in number, though increasing, and were persecuted by the government and by pagans. But, with the advent of

Constantine as emperor, who made his profession of Christianity in the fourth century, placing Christianity on an equal footing with paganism, people of the Roman world began to accept this now-popular Christianity by the hundreds of thousands.

"But remember, these people had grown up in pagan customs, chief of which was this idolatrous festival of December 25. It was a festival of merrymaking, with its special spirit. They enjoyed it! They didn't want to give it up! … [T]he recognition by Constantine of Sunday, which had been the day of pagan sun worship, and … the influence of the pagan Manichaeism, which identified the SON of God with the physical SUN, gave these pagans of the fourth century, now turning over wholesale to 'Christianity,' their excuse for calling their pagan-festival date of December 25 (birthday of the SUN god), the birthday of the SON of God.

"And *that* is how 'Christmas' became fastened on our Western world! We may call it by another name, but it's the same old pagan sun-worshiping festival still! The only change is in what we call it! You can *call* a rabbit a 'lion,' but it's still a rabbit, just the same."

The truth is, the early Christians did not observe birthdays—not even Christ's birth. The Catholic theologian Origen (A.D. 185-232) acknowledged that "in the Scriptures, sinners alone, not saints, celebrate their birthday" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*).

The *Encyclopedia Americana,* 1944 edition, verifies these origins: "It was, according to many authorities, not celebrated in the first centuries of the Christian church, as the Christian usage in general was to celebrate the *death* of remarkable persons rather than their birth. … A feast was established in memory of this event [Christ's birth] in the fourth century. In the fifth century the Western Church ordered it to be celebrated forever *on the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Sol,* as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed" (emphasis added throughout).

Yes—"Christmas" celebrations preceded Christ's birth by centuries! The "reason for the season" was paganism and the winter solstice. Somewhere around three centuries after Jesus's death, church leaders decided to preserve the celebration but affix Christ's name to it. "The pagan festival with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little

change in spirit and in manner," says the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*.

As you might imagine, this co-opting of paganism didn't sit well with many pious believers at the time. Nowhere does Scripture advocate celebrating Christ's birthday—or any birthday, for that matter. Unsurprisingly, then, as Christianity Today's *Christian History* explained, many believed "it would be wrong to honor Christ in the same way Pharaoh and Herod were honored. Birthdays were for pagan gods" (Aug. 8, 2008). *Schaff-Herzog* further says, "Christian preachers of the West and the Near East protested against the unseemly frivolity with which Christ's birthday was celebrated, while Christians of Mesopotamia accused their Western brethren of idolatry and sun worship for adopting as Christian this pagan festival." If only they could see how "Christ's birthday" is celebrated today.

Christian History said, "The pagan origins of the Christmas date, as well as pagan origins for many Christmas customs (gift-giving and merrymaking from Roman Saturnalia; greenery, lights and charity from the Roman New Year; Yule logs and various foods from Teutonic feasts), have always fueled arguments against the holiday. 'It's just paganism wrapped with a Christian bow,' naysayers argue."

People who keep Christmas dismiss these facts as irrelevant. But before you do, ask yourself whether *God* does.

The Significance of December 25

As the *Encyclopedia Americana* noted, the date of Christ's birth is uncertain. December 25 is widely *assumed* to be when He was born. But research reveals that this *could not* be the correct date!

When Jesus Christ was born, the Gospel of Luke records that "there were in the same country *shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night"* (Luke 2:8). December is in the midst of a cold, rainy season in Judea. The shepherds always brought their flocks in from the fields and mountains to be corralled by mid-October at the latest, for their protection. Song of Solomon 2:11 and Ezra 10:9 and 13 show that winter was a rainy season, thus confirming that the shepherds would not have

been in open fields on December 25, during the dead of winter.

Notice what Edmond Stapfer writes in his book *Palestine in the Time of Christ:* "The sheep passed the whole summer in the fields. … In the month … which corresponds to the half of October and the half of November, the sheep were brought back into the fold, and kept there through the winter."

Adam Clarke's Commentary addresses the question this way: "It was a custom among the Jews to send out their sheep to the deserts, about the Passover [early spring], and bring them home at the commencement of the *first rain.* During the time they were out, the shepherds watched them night and day. As … the *first rain* began early in the month of *Marchesvan,* which answers to part of our *October* and *November,* we find that the sheep were kept out in the open country during the whole of the *summer.* And as these shepherds had not *yet* brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that *October* had not yet commenced, and that consequently, our Lord was not born on the *25th of December,* when no flocks were out in the fields; nor could He have been born later than *September,* as the flocks were still in the fields *by night.* On this very ground, the *nativity* in *December* should be given up. The feeding of the flocks by night in the fields is a *chronological fact* …."

It was too cold for the sheep to be out in the fields in late December. Why then would Christ's birth be celebrated on this day? *Encyclopedia Britannica* states, "The reason why Christmas came to be celebrated on December 25 remains uncertain, but most probably the reason is that early Christians wished the date to coincide with the pagan Roman festival marking the 'birthday of the unconquered sun.'"

The Catholic Church's own encyclopedia, the *Catholic Encyclopedia,* makes many startling admissions about this subject. Here are just a few from the 1911 edition. "Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church." That's right—Christmas was not instituted by Jesus Christ, nor was it observed by any of the apostles personally instructed by Christ. "The first evidence of the feast is *from Egypt"* (not Jerusalem). About A.D. 200, Egyptian theologians began celebrating the birth of Christ on the 25th of Pachon, which corresponds to May 20 on our calendar. "*Pagan customs* centering round the January calends gravitated to Christmas."

As you can see, secular and Catholic history show that, originally,

Christmas was definitely NOT about celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. The Catholic Church adopted the custom from pagans. But where did the pagans get it?

In order to find the true origins of Christmas and the traditions surrounding it, we must look back even further to another historical source, the one true source of living knowledge: the Holy Bible.

Organized Rebellion Against God

During the time of the Flood recorded in the book of Genesis, God intervened to bring Satan's deceptive workings to a screeching halt. Man had become so perverted and evil that God was prepared to start all over (Genesis 6:5-7). Yet, soon after the Flood, Satan got busy and set up ANOTHER PAGAN system.

The four centuries following the Flood were perhaps the *most crucial* in human history. They were the scene of a TREMENDOUS STRUGGLE FOR THE CONTROL OF MANKIND.

Covered in just the briefest detail in the Bible, 100 years after the Flood, the Mesopotamian valley had become overpopulated as Noah's descendants fulfilled God's command to multiply and to replenish the Earth (Genesis 9:1). Jewish historian Josephus recorded in *Antiquities of the Jews:* "God also commanded them to send colonies abroad, for the thorough peopling of the Earth—that they might not raise seditions among themselves, but might cultivate a great part of the Earth, and enjoy its fruits after a plentiful manner: But they were *so ill instructed* that they did not obey God …."

Note that somebody had been teaching these people WRONG PRINCIPLES and CUSTOMS, which they carried into all corners of the Earth.

In Genesis 10:8-9, a man named Nimrod is described as "a mighty one." The Hebrew indicates he had become a TYRANT, or DESPOT. He was known everywhere for his "MIGHT." The name *Nimrod* in Hebrew is derived from *marad,* meaning "he rebelled." Although later he assumed many different names, the one that matters to God is the one that describes him best: "he rebelled."

Nimrod, grandson of Noah's son Ham, laid the foundation of a system

of organized competition. He ruled based on the competitive and profit-making economic system. He built the tower of Babel, the original Babylon, ancient Nineveh, and many other cities, and organized this world's first kingdom—all in defiance of God.

Nimrod copied, propagated and expanded on the society and customs that had been in existence before the Flood, a system God calls the "way of Cain" (Jude 11)—a way that had led to *total destruction.*

Ancient writings reveal much about this man who started the great *organized apostasy* from God. In fact, Nimrod founded the Babylonian system that has gripped the world ever since. He institutionalized his defiance of God in a way that *still dominates our world.*

Nimrod was so evil, it is said he married his own mother, whose name was Semiramis. Semiramis, through her schemings, had become known as the Babylonian "queen of heaven." That made Nimrod the "divine son of heaven." Together they became a PERVERTED MOTHER-SON TANDEM.

"With the civil power he wielded, Nimrod set himself up as the priest of the things worshiped by the people, to obtain a stronger hold on them and gradually put himself IN PLACE OF THE TRUE GOD" (Dr. C. Paul Meredith, *Satan's Great Deception*).

As the self-appointed high priest of the sun god Merodach—also known as Molech or Baal—Nimrod oversaw some atrocious acts, including the "purification" of infants by sacrificing them in fire. This repulsed God greatly (e.g. Leviticus 18:21; Jeremiah 32:35; Ezekiel 20:31) and led to the death of Nimrod. Nimrod's own violence had to be paid for with his life (Genesis 9:6).

The Bible is silent on how Nimrod died, but ancient tradition says he came to a violent end. Tradition suggests that Nimrod may have been executed by Shem, son of Noah, who deeply opposed Nimrod's rebellion against God. Shem was the son who walked most closely in the ways of God that his father taught him.

The tradition continues that Nimrod's body was cut in pieces, burned and then sent to various families of the Earth as a warning from God. Nimrod was cut down, like a tree is felled by the axe.

While Nimrod was alive, he had put himself in the place of God by his dictatorial rule. When he died, his admirers CONTINUED TO WORSHIP HIM AS

A DIVINE HERO! They CALLED HIM "BAAL," a name found later throughout the Old Testament. "Baal" means *master* or *lord.* It was only natural that Nimrod should claim that name. He put himself in the very place of the true Lord or Master of the entire universe. But *Baal* was not Nimrod's only other name—he had *many* names. In Babylonia he was known as *Tammuz.* In Syria and Greece, *Adonis*—which also meant *lord.* In Egypt he was the god Osiris, and was identified in "mystery" symbolism as the bull!

The Sun God Returns

Wondering what this ancient history has to do with modern Christmas? Notice this: After Nimrod's death, Semiramis became ruler of her son's kingdom. Used by Satan, she spread an evil doctrine: that Nimrod survived —as a spirit being. She promoted a mystery religion in which she claimed that Nimrod now *was* the SUN GOD.

Like her son, Semiramis also became known by various names. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* identifies her as "connected with the doves of Ishtar or Astarte. … The irresistible charms of Semiramis, her sexual excesses, and other features of the legend, all bear out the view that she is primarily a form of Astarte, and so fittingly conceived as the great queen of Assyria."

Lange's Commentary states that "Ashtaroth … corresponds to Hera, the star queen. Ashtoreth means 'the star.' … Moon and stars, the luminaries of the night-sky, are blended in Ashtaroth. She represents the collective host of heaven."

Semiramis was worshiped as the QUEEN OF HEAVEN, or the great MOTHER OF GOD. She committed fornication with the leading men at that time, coaxing them into accepting this mystery religion that took the place of the true worship of God. She even claimed that one of her illegitimate sons, Tammuz, was brought into being by a magic beam of light from the great sun god. Claiming the baby to be a reborn Nimrod, the promised seed of Genesis 3:15, Semiramis originated the story that a full-grown evergreen tree sprang overnight from a dead tree stump, which symbolized the springing forth unto new life of the dead Nimrod. On each anniversary of his birth, Semiramis claimed, Nimrod would visit the

evergreen tree and leave gifts upon it. The new evergreen tree symbolized that Nimrod had come to life again in Tammuz.

This is the real origin of Santa Claus and the Christmas tree. It is why Jeremiah knew of the Christmas tree six centuries before Jesus Christ was even born.

Note what God recorded by the hand of this prophet: "Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel" (Jeremiah 10:1). God wants us to pay close attention to this. He demands us to hear *His perspective* on this custom.

"Thus saith the LORD, *Learn not the way of the heathen,* and be not dismayed at the SIGNS OF HEAVEN; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the CUSTOMS of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go" (verses 2-5).

God does not mince any words here. He condemns these *heathen customs,* these "doctrines of vanities" (verse 8) and states that they show a lack of fear and reverence for Him as the "King of nations" (verse 7).

Jeremiah also talked of this tree in relation to the "signs of heaven," which refers to these self-exalted deities of the sun god, Baal, and the queen of heaven, Astarte.

In the days of Jeremiah, people were making an idol out of the tree. The word *workman* in Jeremiah 10:3 does not describe a lumberjack. The Hebrew word means a craftsman, engraver or artificer—in other words, a sculptor of idols. The same word in Isaiah 40:19-20 and Hosea 8:4-6 describes the fabricator of graven images.

In at least 10 biblical references, the *green* tree is associated with idolatry and false worship (e.g. 1 Kings 14:23). Since all trees are green at least part of the year, the explicit mention of "green" refers to species that retain their foliage year-round: evergreens.

The word *axe* used in Jeremiah 10:3 refers specifically to a carving tool. God is clearly condemning the use and decoration of an evergreen tree, and expressing His disgust with man's disobedience to the Second Commandment (Exodus 20:4-6). God says those who disregard His

commands show they hate Him. God condemns pagan, heathen practices —including the Christmas tree.

More Christmas Customs

Long before the time of Christ, pagan Romans celebrated *Brumalia,* or the re-birth of the sun, after the winter solstice. They celebrated this festival with the same customs they kept on the birthday of their deity—the god of the SUN. It was pure idolatry.

The symbols of the Brumalia celebrations stood for a wide variety of pagan superstitions involving the source of life, or fertility. They used a little tree, which was supposed to have grown up overnight out of an old dead log. Today, the sapling is called a Christmas tree; the log is named "Yule." They used round orbs and eggs, on which they painted snakes and other designs. This was long before the time of tinsel and glass. The gilded nuts and orbs symbolized the sun, reminding the pagans of what they believed to be their source of life. They fashioned wreaths of holly because it was one of the rare plants that still contains little round fruits in midwinter, even in the snowy north.

They also used mistletoe because of a pagan superstition involving its qualities of aphrodisia—a reason why people still carry on the pagan superstition of kissing under the mistletoe.

"Now where did we get this mistletoe custom?" wrote Mr. Armstrong in his booklet on Christmas. "Among the ancient pagans the mistletoe was used at this festival of the winter solstice because it was considered sacred to the sun, because of its supposed miraculous healing power. The pagan custom of kissing under the mistletoe was an early step in the night of revelry and drunken debauchery—celebrating the death of the 'old sun' and the birth of the new at the winter solstice. Mistletoe, sacred in pagan festivals, is a parasite!

"Holly berries were also considered sacred to the sun god. The Yule log is in reality the 'sun log.' 'Yule' means 'wheel,' a pagan symbol of the sun. Yet today professing Christians speak of the 'sacred yuletide season'!"

"Christmas customs are an evolution from times that long antedate the Christian period—a descent from seasonal, pagan, religious and

national practices, hedged about with legend and tradition" (*Encyclopedia Britannica,* 15th edition). This and other authoritative reference works corroborate that many decorations such as the holly wreath, mistletoe and Yule log are relics of pre-Christian times!

During the time of the Roman Empire, for hundreds of years prior to "Christianity" coming into the mainstream of Western culture, pagan festivals were celebrated. *Encyclopedia Britannica* explains, "In the Roman world the Saturnalia (December 17-23) was a time of merrymaking and exchange of gifts. December 25 was also regarded as the birth date of the Iranian mystery god Mithra, the Sun of Righteousness. On the Roman New Year (January 1), houses were decorated with greenery and lights, and gifts were given to children and the poor. To these observances were added the German and Celtic Yule rites when the Teutonic tribes penetrated into Gaul, Britain and central Europe. Food and good fellowship, the Yule log and Yule cakes, greenery and fir trees, and gifts and greetings all commemorated different aspects of this festive season."

Is it coincidence that these customs are so closely associated with Christmas to this day?

As we look around during the Christmas season, we are witnessing modern versions of observances that were established centuries before the birth of Christ. Christianity absorbed those customs with no scriptural instruction to do so. It was not until over 300 years after Christ's death that pagan Romans convinced the religious authorities to accept their festive Saturnalia and stamp Christ's name on it.

Every one of the pagan customs that now pollutes mainstream Christianity began out of deliberate rebellion against the Creator God, the same Being who came to this Earth to educate us with the truth and save us out of our deception and our sin.

Didn't the Wise Men Give Gifts?

But what about what many consider to be the most important Christmas tradition, that of *buying and exchanging gifts?* At least *that* is in the Bible—right? After all, didn't the wise men give gifts at Jesus's birth?

The facts show that, even here, Christmas-keepers are in for some

surprises.

Bibliotheca Sacra, Volume 12, notes, "The interchange of presents between friends is alike characteristic of Christmas and the Saturnalia, and *must have been adopted by Christians from the pagans,* as the admonition of Tertullian plainly shows."

"The fact is, this custom fastened upon people of exchanging gifts with friends and relatives at the Christmas season *has not a single trace of Christianity about it,* strange though that may seem!" Mr. Armstrong wrote. "This does not celebrate Christ's birthday nor honor it or Him! Suppose someone you love has a birthday. You want to honor that person on his or her birthday. Would you lavishly buy gifts for *everybody else,* trading gifts back and forth with all your *other* friends and loved ones, but ignore completely any gift for the one whose birthday you are honoring? Rather absurd when viewed in that light, isn't it?" (op. cit.).

When the wise men presented gifts to Christ in Matthew 2:1-11, they were following an ancient Eastern custom of *presenting gifts to a king* when they came into his presence. They were not giving gifts to each other, as many do today, but to Him (verse 11). Nor were they given on the day when He was born, since it took these wise men several days or even weeks to reach Him.

Adam Clarke's Commentary states the following about verse 11: "The people of the East never approach the presence of kings and great personages, without a *present* in their hands. The custom is often noticed in the Old Testament, and still prevails in the East …."

Even Santa Claus

Everyone who is old enough for their parents to stop fooling them knows that Santa Claus is a myth. But did you know that even he originated in paganism?

"St. Nicholas, bishop of Myra, a saint honored by the Greeks and Latins on the 6th of December …. A legend of his surreptitious bestowal of dowries on the three daughters of an impoverished citizen … is said to have originated the old custom of giving presents in secret on the Eve of St. Nicholas, subsequently transferred to Christmas day. Hence the

association of Christmas with Santa Claus …" (*Encyclopedia Britannica,* 11th edition).

Parents work all year to teach their children not to lie, yet when Christmas comes along, they themselves tell the "Santa Claus" lie. A small child is taught to believe in a man who goes around giving gifts to everyone on Christmas Eve, but no one ever sees him. That child is taught that Santa Claus knows everything about him, and that he better behave or he won't receive a gift. Then when the child grows older, he is told there really isn't a Santa.

Consider it! What ultimate *good* comes from teaching our children this false idea and setting them up for disillusionment? This bizarre tradition could actually do much to damage the foundation of their faith in the very real, living GOD!

But Everybody Else Is Doing It

Christmas is a pagan festival. That is absolute fact. If you just scratch the surface of any of the traditions associated with Christmas, you immediately start finding some rather grotesque, decidedly *un*Christian facts. Some people take offense when they are pointed out, but God commands His faithful Church to proclaim such things (Isaiah 58:1).

Yet even many who know these pagan origins are quick to respond: *I don't worship any pagan sun god! I use these traditions to honor the birth of Jesus Christ.* Christmas is Christian if you make it Christian, many argue. Everyone else is doing it anyway, why should we *not* join in on the merrymaking?

How does God answer such reasoning? Aside from the fact that God does not command Christmas, aside from the fact that Christ wasn't born on December 25 and that its customs are steeped in paganism, does it matter if we keep Christmas for the "right" reasons?

Few, it seems, ever stop to consider what God thinks about these humanly devised traditions.

Doesn't God have the right to tell us *how* and *how not* He wants to be worshiped?

Throughout the Bible, God plainly reveals that He will not accept vain

worship, *even if it is intended to be in His honor!*

Can you observe pagan customs to honor Jesus Christ? Here is God's frank answer: "[T]ake heed that you be not ensnared to follow them [the pagans and their customs], and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods?—that I also may do likewise.' You shall not do so to the LORD your God; *for every abominable thing which the LORD hates* they have done for their gods …" (Deuteronomy 12:30-31; Revised Standard Version). Notice that God not only commands against serving other gods, but also against *attempting to honor the true God by following the same customs of worship* as the people in the world.

"Howbeit in vain do they worship me," Jesus said, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men …" (Mark 7:7-8).

God does not want people to make up their *own ways* to worship Him!

Jesus said in John 4:24 that true worshipers of God obey Him in spirit *and in truth*—which means according to the truth of God's Word (John 17:17).

CHRIST WAS NOT BORN ON, OR ANYWHERE NEAR, DECEMBER 25! The Bible nowhere commands keeping Christ's birthday. The New Testament Church never kept it. There is no record of Jesus Christ or His apostles cutting down a tree to deck it with ornaments. Christmas is an unbiblical tradition manufactured by human reasoning. It's rooted in paganism and is expressly forbidden by the commandments of God. Yet still, as Mr. Armstrong explained in *The Plain Truth About Christmas,* "[M]ost people today take that command of God lightly, or as having no validity whatsoever, and FOLLOW THE TRADITION OF MEN IN OBSERVING CHRISTMAS."

Many know Christmas is pagan but still refuse to give it up. Some will answer that it means so much to the children and that it brings families together. Does it really? Have lies, deceit and paganism ever accomplished such things? Others will say, *But I don't worship the Christmas tree. It is not an idol to me.* God never says that idols are only carved images toward which ignorant religious savages pray. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey …" (Romans 6:16).

If you see how God condemns Christmas, yet you continue keeping it,

the object of your devotion is Christmas—not God. For many people, Christmas is such an idol.

Ask yourself, "What is the *source* of my religion?" Religion is the obedience, service and adoration rendered to the object of one's worship—a system of faith and devotion to a superior authority—the profession, practice and observance of whatsoever belief and practice is required by that superior authority.

One reason Christmas is so popular today is BECAUSE GOD'S LAW FORBIDS OBSERVING THE CUSTOM—and man's mind, as it says in Romans 8:7, IS HOSTILE TO GOD'S LAW! As Mr. Armstrong used to say, if God's law actually *commanded us* to observe Christmas, A LOT FEWER PEOPLE WOULD DO IT!

Another reason for the popularity of Christmas is simply that everyone else seems to be doing it. It's human nature to follow along with the crowd—to blindly accept popular customs, without ever stopping to question why.

Popular opinion should not prevent individuals who know the truth from turning away from a festival season steeped in paganism. Jesus said that, in order to be His disciples, there would be times when we would need to forsake the desires of our family and friends to follow Him (Luke 14:26-27).

Another reason for the universal acceptance of this pagan custom in the Western world: Satan has used FALSE MINISTERS and DECEITFUL WORKERS to blind this world to the plain and simple truth of what the Bible actually says (see 2 Corinthians 4:4; 11:13 and Revelation 12:9).

A Positive Alternative

God doesn't condemn things without just cause. For thousands of years, this celebration was associated with many horrific acts, including child sacrifice. God was alive and witnessed those things. He does not want His name attached to that.

Today, the spirit of Christmas is one of GET. No one asks, "What did you give for Christmas this year?"—but rather, "What did you GET?" God's way, in contrast to Satan's way, is one of giving to others. That way of life

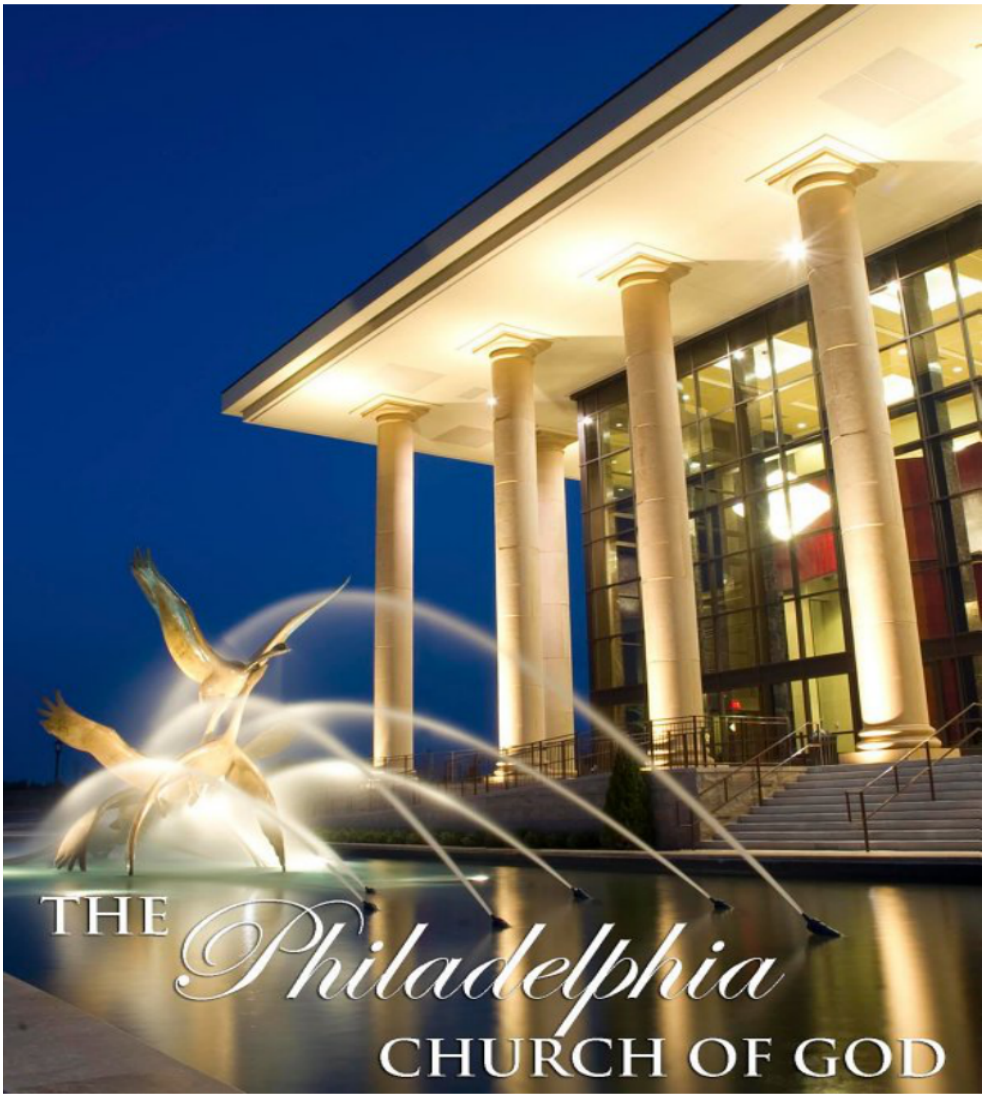
actually brings more joy and blessings (Acts 20:35).

Most importantly, the observation of pagan holidays like Christmas obscures something more wonderful: God's holy days.

The exact date of Christ's birth is UNKNOWN and had it been important, Christ would have commanded it be celebrated—but He did not! We have no record in the Bible of either Himself, His apostles or His Church ever celebrating His birthday. But God *does* command us to memorialize the date of Jesus Christ's *death* (1 Corinthians 11:24-27)—not His birth. That alone shows that God's focus on Jesus Christ is a lot different than the focus of modern Christianity!

Did you ever wonder why we observe one day above others, and on an annual basis? Christmas-keepers didn't invent the idea, nor did the ancient pagans from which several modern holidays came. *God* is the one who created special days to set apart: *holy days.*

God's holy days (which can be found in Leviticus 23) are pure, free from paganism, idolatry, human sacrifice, materialism, falsehood and compromise. And far more than that, they contain spectacular truth that Christmas and other pagan holidays do not—and never have—contained! God's holy days map out His divine plan for mankind. They show how God will redeem the vast majority of mankind, living and dead, Christian and pagan, how He will bring them to repentance of their sins, grant them forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and lead them to true, pure religion, an exciting and *eternal* future. Now *that* is something worth celebrating!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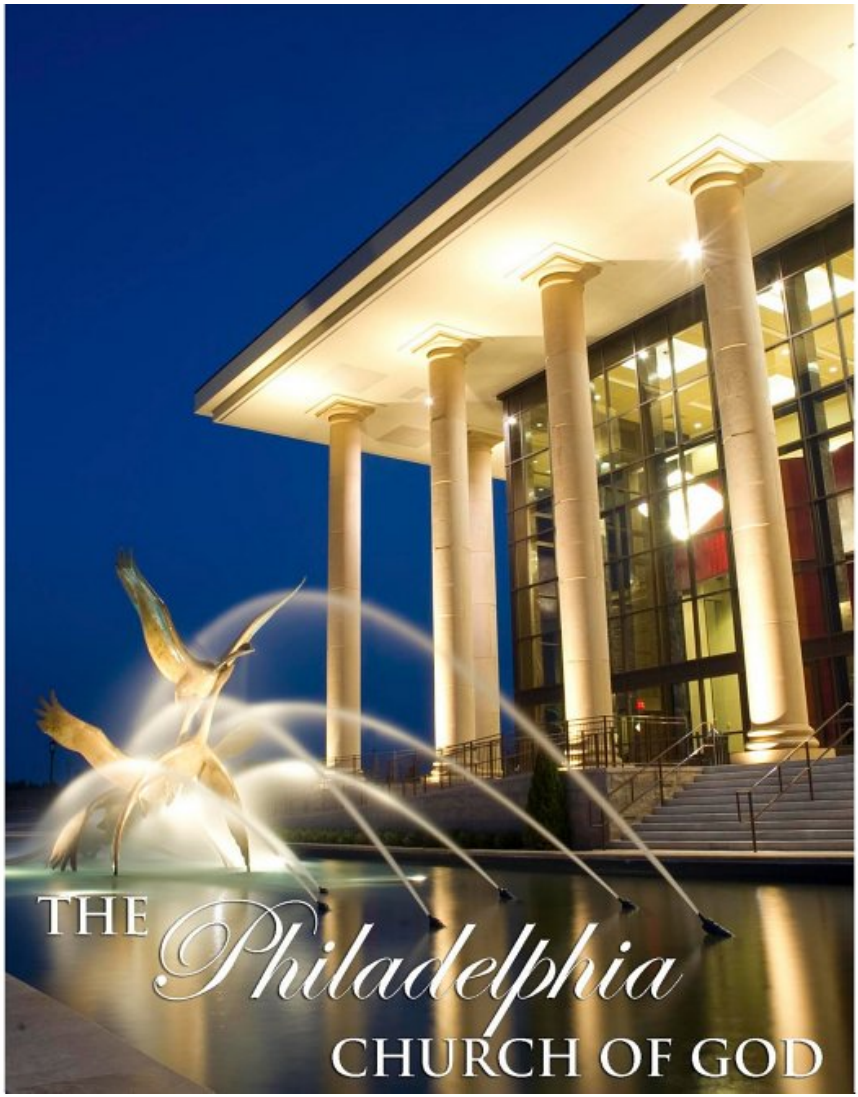

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